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ABSTRACT

In the guise of equality, citizenship, integration, and policy change, the door has opened to allow the development of Aboriginal early childhood services in Canada. Recognition of the need for early childhood services specific to Aboriginal people did not become prominent until the mid-1980s. A decade later, services came into being. Little time was given to communities for planning and development, and capacity, including implementation resources, was often limited. Coinciding with this development of services were government research and development initiatives designed to support the creation of service delivery models, training models, program and evaluation models, and research-specific studies. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a handful of national inquiries determined that Aboriginal child care was important not only for addressing economic barriers to employment and education, but for preserving and transmitting Aboriginal culture. Given the historical and contemporary context of assimilation, Aboriginal people want control of child care programs for their children. With the introduction of the National Children's Agenda (2000), there is hope that Aboriginal children will be included in a meaningful way, although no specific announcement for Aboriginal children has been made. There continues to be a need for further exploration of Aboriginal early childhood from both a policy and services delivery perspective. Studies that give voice to community and that document services as they are being developed may also prove to be valuable sources for future early childhood service development. (Contains 68 references.) (TD)

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ABORIGINAL EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES IN CANADA

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Introduction

Aboriginal early childhood services in Canada has been for the most part, ignored by academics, as a result few references to it can be found in the scholarly literature. Not until the mid 1980s did Aboriginal early childhood services gain academic attention. With government acknowledgment of the need for Aboriginal services government funded studies and reports began to appear. The 1990s saw a flurry of activity in the development of early childhood services for Aboriginal children residing both on and off reserve. This activity fueled government funded literature on Aboriginal early childhood. However this increase was not paralleled by an increase in academic literature.

The following paper presents an overview of the academic and non-academic literature identifying themes that reflect the development of Aboriginal early childhood services. From the 1960s to the mid 1980s the need for services dominates the literature. The mid 1980s to mid 1990s saw activities focused on preparing for service delivery. Development of Aboriginal early childhood services began in the mid 1990s with a Liberal Party commitment to on reserve child care and an Aboriginal Head Start program. These services continue to be developed rapidly with little time for reflection and planning. Their development is also embedded in a policy context that is complex in its consideration of the interface between Canadian social policy and the unique legislation and policies that govern Aboriginal peoples of Canada. To better understand the development of Aboriginal early childhood services it is important to first examine this policy context.

The Policy Context

You cannot understand the present until you understand the past.

During the period of World War II (1939-45) policy makers gave scant attention to Indian[1] matters. Ad hoc policies were developed but no substantive policy development occurred. After the war Canada entered a period of renewed interest in Indian policy. This interest resulted from public

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[1] The term Indian in this paper is used to signify status Indians or First Nations peoples.

pressure to examine the plight of Indian people, some who had fought alongside other Canadians on the war front, and the failure of assimilation policies. (Gangis & Jones, 1998, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996) Stark differences between Indians and the broader Canadian society became evident. As Canada entered an era of philosophical and structural modernization that resulted in the modern welfare state, revisions and changes to Canadian government structure and policy served to continue the assimilation of Indians into Canadian society. Specific Indian legislative and policy changes presented in the guise of citizenship, equality, integration and rights in the 60s and 70s, as local control and partnership in the 1980s and 1990s, continued to assert the goals of assimilation set out in the 1876 *Indian Act* (Di Gangis & Jones, 1998; Tobias, J., 1991; Weaver, S., 1986; Dyck N. Ed., 1985; Hawthorne, Ed., 1966). Assimilation, as set out in the *Act,* refers to the loss of collective rights for Aboriginal peoples along with their cultural, economic and social integration into the broader Canadian society. The intent and practice of assimilation for immigrants differs from that of Aboriginal peoples by emphasizing cultural, economic and social integration, whereas Aboriginal peoples also experience a loss of collective rights and title. Assimilation in this paper refers to the latter. The following paragraphs examine Canadian social and Indian policy development from 1945 to current day.

The 1946 Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons on Indian Affairs was struck to study Canada's Indian administration, with a view to revising the *Indian Act*. Two years later the committee came back with an extended goal of assimilation. The new policy guidelines, presented by the joint committee, recommended achieving the goal of assimilation by turning responsibilities for services to Indians over to the provinces. Although these guidelines could not ensure speedy assimilation of Indian people into the broader Canadian society, it was the alternative the Canadian government was looking for. The overall policy goals were to erode barriers provided by the reserves and the Indians' special status under the constitution through a new policy of provincial intrusion on reserves (Tobias, 1991).

> A revised Indian Act was passed in 1951. This new Act returned to the philosophy of the original Indian Act: civilization was to be encouraged but not directed or forced on the Indian people. Assimilation for all Indians was a goal that should be striven for... (Tobias, 1991, p.

140)

The clearest statement of utilizing provincial powers to produce assimilation rested in Section 88 of the new Act. Section 88 reinforced the legitimacy of the new policy direction.

> Subject to the terms of any treaty and any other Act of the Parliament of Canada, all laws of general application from time to time in force in any province are applicable to and in respect of Indians in the province, except to the extent that such laws are inconsistent with this Act or any order, rule, regulation or by-law made there under, and except to the extent that such laws make provision for any matter for which provision is made by or under this Act.

This section continues to be pointed to as proof of provincial jurisdiction over First Nations social programs, raising questions of First Nations jurisdiction and establishing a foundation for resistance to First Nations autonomy.

In the same year (1946) the Department of Indian Affairs entered into formal agreements with local and provincial governments to provide hospital services for Indians. Agreements with local school boards for the integration of Indian children into provincial schools also occurred. In 1950, Canada and BC signed the first federal-provincial agreement designed to integrate Indian children into the provincial school system (Di Gangis & Jones, 1998). The federal government was setting the stage for provincial jurisdiction over Indians while at the same time reducing their responsibility for Indian peoples.

As Canada was addressing Indian policy so was it had already entered into the development of the modern welfare state. According to Moscovitch and Webster (1995) the establishment of the welfare state is characterized by four legislative and policy changes:

> 1. Transformation of minimum income programs from a form of punishment to a response for need;
> 2. Acknowledgment that unemployment is a function of the market, not a result of poor individual character (this transforms income support from a matter of charity to a matter of right);
> 3. Linkage between labor market and the household (i.e. payments based on numbers); and
> 4. The development of global public social, educational and health services, universally acceptable. (pp. 16-18)

These changes were evidenced as Canada developed universal programs that were either fully funded by the federal government or cost shared with the provinces. The first national program to be

established was the *Unemployment Insurance Program*. A constitutional amendment was required to give the federal government authority to establish it even though the program was administered by provincial and municipal governments. The significance of this program was identified by Leonard Marsh, Director of Social Research at McGill University in 1940, in his Report on Social Security for Canada:

> Two important themes emerge from this document. First provisions for unemployment are the greater need in any social security program designed for a modern industrial society. Second there is a clear distinction between universal risks, which apply to all persons, and unemployment risks, which apply to wage-earners only. Marsh's report was a declaration that society must provide for those needs that are beyond the control of individuals; it was a rejection of the concepts of laissez-faire and worthy and unworthy poor. (Turner & Turner, 1986, pp 56-57, as quoted in Di Gangi & Jones, 1998, pp. 147-148)

Although this program was meant to be universal, economies of a seasonal nature were excluded thereby excluding the majority of Indian wage-earners.

In 1945, *Family Allowance* was introduced. This federal government program provided cash directly to mothers based on the number of children in the family. However, the government did not always provide a similar benefit directly to Indian mothers. Instead, the Department of Indian Affairs administered the program through local Indian Agents as an extension of welfare rations. This deviation in federal policy left Indians vulnerable to local Agents who were in a position to withhold or threaten to withhold goods to exact compliance with a desired behavior such as sending children to residential schools or withholding goods when children were absent from schools. This was not the case for non-Indian families. What was given as a right to other Canadians was manipulated as coercive charity for Indians.

National social programs continued to grow over the next decade (1945-1955) through new and amended legislation. The *Old Age Security Act*, the *Old Age Assistance Act*, and the *Blind Persons Act* all appeared at this time. Provincial governments organized their legislation so they could take advantage of these new federal monies. In some cases this meant realigning provincial legislation to meet national standards, in other instances it meant cost sharing programs with the federal government (i.e., using provincial monies for Indian people living off reserve). In effect, the federal

government forced provincial governments into either providing services to Indian peoples or receiving no monies (Di Gangis & Jones, 1998).

The 1960s were guided by a policy of integration and equality that sought to "normalize relations with Indians by discarding assimilation and separateness (reserves) in favor of a principle of assimilation through integration and mainstreaming of Aboriginal peoples" (Di Gangis & Jones, 1998, p. 22). Laws prohibiting Indians living on reserve from becoming citizens were eliminated. Citizenship was no longer dependent on acceptable levels of assimilations. Indians could now be Canadian citizens without being forced to relinquish Indian status (Crawford, n.d., p. 18). This new policy continued to reflect the common assumption that to be citizens of Canada Indians must be integrated into the broader Canadian society.

The federal government continued to develop national programs that would be administered by provincial governments. In 1964, the federal government tried to get provincial agreement with their plan to have the provinces administer welfare and community development programs on reserve. Only one province agreed. Ontario entered into an agreement with the federal government for delivery of welfare services on reserve the following year. Without full provincial co-operation, Canada's goal of integrating Indians into the provincial delivery system failed. (Di Gangis & Jones, 1998)

By 1965, however, several provinces had signed Master Tuition Agreements with the federal government for the delivery of education services to Indian children within the provincial system (Di Gangis & Jones, 1998). Hawthorne's report, *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada, Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies, Part 2* released in 1967, describe the plight of Indian children in provincial schools.

> ... The atmosphere of the school, the routines, the rewards, and the expectations provide a critically different experience for the Indian child than for the non-Indian child. Discontinuity of socialization, repeated failure, discrimination and lack of significance of the educational process in the life of the Indian child result in diminishing motivation, increasing negativism, poor self-images and low levels of aspiration. Until some compromises can be made by the school and the Indian and non-Indian communities, the impasse will remain and the sense of worth of the Indian student will remain low, inhibiting adequate academic achievement. (p. 130)

Despite these findings of integrating Indian children into the provincial education system, education

continued to be seen as means to prepare Indians for the inevitability of interacting with the broader Canadian society.

> ... the key to the full realization of self-determination and self-government and mutual self-respect for the heritage and culture of Indian and non-Indian, will be found in the field of education .... Education is necessary if Indian people are to be able to fit properly and competently into our economic and social structure and effectively fill the role, which will be demanded of them in years to come, as spokesman and leaders of their own people. (Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on Indian Affairs, 1961, pp. 610-611, as quoted in Hawthorne, 1967, p.30.)

The desire was to "see Indians integrate completely in the economic and social life of Canada and to live on an equal footing with other citizens of the country" (Hawthorne, 1967, p. 23). There was no mention of past history nor recognition of the unique status of Indian peoples or their rights. Although clouded in idealistic words of equality, integration, and citizenship the underlying desire of assimilation remained. Socialization of Indian children continued through integrated education as provincial schools replaced residential schools and on reserve day schools. Despite the assimilation underpinnings, the democratic ideology espoused in the Hawthorne Report (1967) would significantly impact Canadian Indian policy for years to come.

As Indian children began attending provincial schools the federal government did not abandoned its desire for the provinces to also assume responsibility for delivery of social services to Indians. In 1966, the *Canada Assistance Plan Act* (CAP) was introduced. This *Act* consolidated all federal income support programs into one open-ended 50-50 cost-sharing arrangement with the provinces. There were two parts to the plan: Part 1, included Indians living off reserve; Part 2, provided opportunities for provinces to administer services to Indian residing on reserve. None of the provinces took advantage of this with the exception of Ontario who had signed an agreement to that effect in 1965.

In 1967, the federal government was pressured by the public to review and change the *Indian Act*. Changes were to focus on two goals: 1) to prepare and enable Indian band councils and individuals to take more responsibility, authority and initiative in municipal type government and economic development; and 2) to facilitate arrangements and understandings with provinces and the

territorial governments that would permit the extension of their education, welfare and health, municipal and other services to Indians according to the same legislation and standards applying to non-Indians (Di Gangis & Jones, 1998).

In 1969, with the transfer of services for Indians to the provinces seemingly near completion, the federal government brought forth a *White Paper on Indian Policy* (1969). The *White Paper* announced,

> the government ['s] ... intention to absolve itself from responsibility for Indian affairs and the special status of Indians and to repeal special legislation relating to Indians - that is, the Indian Act. By adoption of this policy and by repealing the Indian Act the Indian would be assimilated by government fiat, and what the Indian Act of 1876 had sought as a long-term goal - the extirpation of the Indian and Indian lands - would be realized. (Tobias, 1991, p. 141)

> [It] sought to end the collective rights of Aboriginal people in favour of individual rights. Included were plans to eliminate the protection for reserve lands, to terminate the legal status of Indian peoples, and to have services delivered to them by provincial governments. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 202)

The *White Paper* resonated with the ideology found in the *Hawthrone Report* (1966).

> The White Paper argued that 'equality' or 'non-discrimination', as it was often phrased, was the key ingredient in a solution to the problems of Indians, and that special rights had been the major cause of their problems. The goal of equality was to be achieved by terminating the special legislation and bureaucracy that had developed over the past century to deal with Indians, and by transferring to the provinces the responsibility for administering services to Indians. Henceforth Indians would receive the same services from the same sources as other Canadians after a transitional period in which enriched programs of economic development were to be offered. The large Indian Affairs bureaucracy would be dismantled within five years, and the federal government was to retain trusteeship function only for Indian lands, which would be administered through an Indians Lands Act. By implication, the result of the policy would see Indians with 'Indian problems' become provincial citizens with regular citizen's problems. The policy was essentially one of 'formal equality' to use Cairns' phrase from the Hawthorne Report (1966), [however,] the question remained as to whether [formal equality] would foster equality of opportunity for this disadvantaged minority. Cairns had argued three years previously that such a policy would not: 'The equal treatment in law and services of a people who at the present time do not have equal competitive capacities will not suffice for the attainment of substantive socio-economic equality' (Hawthorne, 1966, p. 392, as quoted in Weaver, 1981, p. 4).

Aboriginal peoples[2] across the country protested the *White Paper* (1969). They gathered in strength and formed their own organizations to respond. The Indian Association of Alberta responded with the *Red Paper* (1970). This document described how Indian peoples with distinct cultures wished to contribute to Canadian society while at the same time exercising political and economic power at the community level. It also became the impetus for the development of the National Indian Brotherhood (1974) known as the Assembly of First Nations today (Tobias, 1991).

Faced with strong resistance from both First Nations[3] peoples and provincial governments, and possible legal challenges the federal government was forced to shelve the *White Paper* (1969) and in 1973 announced its withdrawal. The federal government continued to pursue its policy of assimilation under the guise of partnership, consultation and local control tied to federal and standards and laws. Components of the *White Paper* policy were to be broken down and implemented separately using a low-key approach so that the larger goal of assimilation was not lost (Di Gangis & Jones, 1998).

The early 1970s was a time of general prosperity, and rapid expansion in programs and services for Indian peoples. The result was the enhanced dependency of Indian peoples. Increased amounts of money were put into social programs but none targeted the root dilemma of dependency. By 1978-79, Indian and Inuit Affairs program expenditures for social assistance and support accounted for 22.3% of its budget compared to 6.6% allocated for Indian economic development (Thalassa, 1983, as quoted in Di Gangis & Jones, 1998). The late 1970s saw a shift from the development of social welfare programs and increased expenditures to a time of evaluation and accountability (Di Gangis & Jones, 1998).

Repatriation of the Canadian constitution, land claims and Aboriginal rights, along with fiscal restraint, improved federal-provincial relations, and job creation strategies characterized the 1980s. National Aboriginal political organizations continued to grow and the courts held differing views on Indian matters from those of the federal government. Public support for Aboriginal people and their

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[2]Aboriginal peoples in this paper is meant to signify status and non-status Indians, Metis and Inuit peoples.

[3] First Nations peoples refers to status Indians.

struggles increased across the country. Non-Aboriginal organizations pressed the government to address Aboriginal rights to land and self-determination.

The split decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in *Calder v. Attorney General BC* , [1973] 4 W.W.R. 1, led the federal government to establish its first land claims policy directed towards settling the comprehensive claims of Aboriginal groups' rights to traditional use and occupancy of their lands. However, the comprehensive land claims policy has been seriously criticized for requiring First Nations and Inuit peoples to extinguish their title and rights in exchange for settlement agreements that do not allow for self- government initiatives (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Nonetheless, Aboriginal land claims were brought into the limelight of public opinion.

Following the 1980 Quebec referendum and the failure of the First Minister's conference on the constitution, in 1982 the federal government decided to repatriate and amend the constitution. In the repatriation process, Aboriginal leaders were able to successfully ensure that the *Constitution Act,* (1982), would contain sections that would recognize Aboriginal rights and ensure that individual rights could not annul or diminish Aboriginal collective rights.

At the time section 35 of the *Constitution Act,* read:

> (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.
> (2) In this Act "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada. s. 35

Section 25 of the *Act* on the other hand read:

> (a) Any rights or freedoms that have been recognized by the Royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763; and
> (b) Any rights or freedoms that may be acquired by the aboriginal peoples of Canada by way of land claims settlement. s. 25

Section 37 of the *Constitution Act,* (1982) provided for a single constitutional conference (held in 1983) to identify and define those Aboriginal rights and for the participation of Aboriginal peoples' leaders and territorial government delegates (p. 207). The 1983 constitutional conference resulted in amendments to the *Constitution of Canada* and a commitment to a formal First Ministers conference. The constitutional conference resulted in amendments to subsections 35 (3) and (4) of the

Act, which now reads:

> (3) For greater certainty, in subsection (1) "treaty rights" includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.
>
> (4) Notwithstanding any other provision of the Act, the aboriginal and treaty rights referred to in subsection (1) are guaranteed equally to male and female persons."

As a result of the constitutional conference, subsection 25 (b) was also amended to include:

> (b) Any rights or freedoms that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.

In December, 1982 Parliament also established the Special Committee on Indian Self-Government. Aboriginal leaders used this time of recognition to clearly articulate their desire for self-government and control over all aspects of service delivery, in particular child welfare. However earlier in the year INAC[4] had issued a circular ruling that any further developments in Indian child welfare services must be based on tripartite negotiations where Indian agencies are responsible for the administration of provincial legislation and procedures funded by the federal government. (INAC, 1982) Indian bands/agencies would have executive powers but not the legislative or judicial powers associated with self-government. According to Taylor-Henley & Hudson (1992), INAC was "clearly responding out of its concern for the delicacy and sensitivity of federal-provincial relationships"(p. 19). Aboriginal leaders across the country protested but to no avail.

In Taylor-Henley & Hudson's (1992) analysis

> ... a major dilemma was built into the delegated authority model from the onset. ... Indian organizations were determined to improve the quality and quantity of child welfare services to reserves, and they were anxious to develop their own sources of funds and delivery structure. In order to make progress in that area, they had to recognize a role for the province. ... Paradoxically, the only route open to decolonization of child welfare services was to affirm and accept a non-Indian authority and be governed by its legislation. (p. 19)

Indian organizations signed these agreements between federal and provincial governments in order to make some progress but never fully accepted the relationship between the province and Aboriginal agencies. (Taylor-Henley & Hudson, 1992)

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[4]INAC - Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

It was in the midst of this change and recognition of Aboriginal rights that Mulroney's Tory government was elected in 1984. The Constitutional Conference of 1983 had resulted in three more First Ministers conferences in 1984, 1985 and 1987. The focus of these conferences was Aboriginal self-governance. Aboriginal groups came to the negotiations with the position that the right to self-government was inherent neither delegated nor constitutionally created. This position was advocated in the House of Commons Special Committee on Indian Self-Government*'s Penner Report* (1983). Mulroney chaired the last two of the three First Minister's meetings to no avail. Consensus could not be reached on the question of whether or not Aboriginal self-government flowed from an inherent right and should be included in the definition of 'treaty and Aboriginal rights' or whether it was to be delegated from federal and provincial governments. As a result there were no further amendments to the Constitution in any of the three First Minister's conferences. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996)

The Tory platform of reduced government spending and overall reduction in government's role and size mirrored the call for fiscal restraint that started in the 1970s. In 1985, then Deputy Prime Minister Erik Nielsen was directed to conduct a review of government programs and services. This *Task Force on Program Review* "focused on identifying areas of overlap between federal and provincial governments, and programs which could be eliminated, reduced, or shifted to another level of government." (*Indian and Native Programs: A Study Team Reports to the Task Force on Program Review, 1986,* as quoted in Di Gangi & Jones 1998, p.165)

The task force found that although federal government expenditures for Indians had increased to about three billion dollars in 1984-85, the money had only marginal impact on Indian living conditions. Rather than examining the root of this problem, the task force looked for ways to reduce government funding. The task force reported that 25% of expenditures were related to treaty or *Indian Act* obligations, 38% would 'normally' be provincial responsibilities, and 37% was discretionary spending. This gave the government the rationale it needed to reduce programs to Indians thereby reducing expenditures and to invoke provincial government and private sector involvement in delivery of Indian programs and services. At the same time the government sought to pass on its responsibility

for Indians and limit expenditures to Indian communities, in the guise of local control thereby forcing Indian governments to resolve current and historical problems themselves (Di Gangi & Jones, 1998).

This report was met with great resistance from many Indian groups across the country. Unlike the 1960s, First Nations people were more politically skilled at defending and promoting their unique rights and interests. This was also a time of constitutional reform and change. Sally Weaver (1986) says, "... formal announcements of policy without prior consultation, as Nielsen planned, were not destined to elicit Indian consent" (p. 30). She points to the way in which the policy was developed as its downfall.

> ... the new government's attempts to reform Indian policy showed certain striking parallels to those of the new Trudeau regime in 1968. The Nielsen task force on Native programs, like the 1969 White Paper, was mounted at the cabinet level in the context of government priorities, removed for the realpolitik of the department's relations with Indians and the expectations raised among them by new, well-intended ministers. Like the White Paper, the task force operated in isolated secrecy to its own detriment and that of the government. In both instances, old bureaucratic advice found new political receptivity at the cabinet level where it influenced the course of policy development, only to be denounced by Indian people. In both cases, the episodes of deception fortified the institutionalized distrust of government among Indians in regard to policy content and process. (p. 29)

Weaver (1986) coined the concept "foundation policy" which she describes as the "government's first expression of policy reform in the field" (p. 29). These polices are generally informed by a Minister's (and his or her advisor's) unmasked attitudes and values which become viewed as the "real agenda." It is assumed that these values and attitudes will likely shape any new policy development. These are also the policies that become the benchmarks against which government declarations earn or do not earn credibility (Weaver, 1986).

Despite resistance from Aboriginal peoples, Indian Affairs began a process of devolution in November, 1986 based on a long term strategic objective put forth in the Nielsen report:

> Devolution of native problems to native communities from the federal government for resolution through negotiation of local community plans based on community priorities and funded on a multi-year block basis. (Memorandum to Cabinet *Report of the Ministerial Task Force on Native Programs*, 1985, p. 1 as quoted in Di Gangi & Jones, 1998, p. 168)

Treasury Board was reassured by Indian Affairs that there would be no increase in programs nor

program size, and that over time existing legislation, administrative arrangements, and programs and services would be given over to Indian people. Programs consistent with this direction including Alternate Funding Arrangements (AFA) and the Community Based Self Government process, and transfer of INAC programs to other departments such as fisheries and economic development were quickly implemented.

The federal government emphasized the benefits of this new policy direction for First Nations peoples as local control, more flexibility in program expenditures, certainty in funding levels, etc. However these advantages also benefitted the federal government.

> To an informed public, a transfer of responsibility to Native people would make the government appear responsive to Native demands to "get government off our backs." It would also leave Ottawa less accountable politically and legally for the conditions of Native people [who could now be held responsible for their own fate] - "they're managing their own affairs now". (Angus, 1990, p. 26 as quoted in Di Gangi & Jones, 1998, p. 170)

There were setbacks to the implementation of full scale devolution. Just two years earlier the Supreme of Canada had ruled in *Guerin* (1984) that the Crown did owe a legally enforceable fiduciary duty to First Nations generally as well as specifically, in the case of reserve lands management. *Bill C-31*, a revision to the *Indian Act* in 1985, which restored Indian status to thousands of men, women and children who had been stripped of it through *Indian Act* membership provisions, resulted in an increased INAC budget of at least two billion dollars. Despite these setbacks the federal government continued to support recommendations put forth by the Nielsen Task Force. Wherever possible, unilateral decisions were made to off-load cost and obligations to the provinces or simply to cut direct expenditures to Aboriginal people, for example, the halting of off reserve social assistance charge-backs in 1993. In other instances programs were simply eliminated, for example, funding for Aboriginal political associations (Di Gangi, & Jones, 1998).

In the meantime the drive for Aboriginal self-government continued. The *Meech Lake Accord* was signed in 1987. The *Accord* resulted in Quebec being recognized as a 'distinct society.' The *Accord* was silent on Aboriginal and treaty rights. Aboriginal people did not oppose recognition of Quebec as a distinct society so long as Aboriginal people were acknowledged in a like manner. By 1990 the New Brunswick and Manitoba legislatures had not yet approved the constitutional resolution

and Newfoundland and Labrador had rescinded its original approval. The *Meech Lake Accord* was defeated when Elijah Harper, a Manitoba MLA, opposed legislation adopting the *Accord* thereby preventing the unanimous vote required for acceptance by Manitoba law (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). With defeat of the *Meech Lake Accord*,

> Aboriginal peoples were unable to have their nation-to-nation relationship recognized, and Quebec was unable to have its distinctiveness as a society recognized (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 213).

Following the failure of the *Meech Lake Accord* and the land dispute culminating in the Oka crisis in Quebec, the federal government established the Spicer Commission (1990) on national unity. This commission found that Canadians as a whole support Aboriginal self-government and land claims and wanted to acknowledge the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canada. The Spicer report further stated,

> There is an anger, a rage, building in aboriginal communities that will not tolerate much longer the historic paternalism, the bureaucratic evasion and the widespread lack of respect for their concerns. Failure to deal promptly with the needs and aspirations of aboriginal peoples will breed strife that could polarize opinion and make solutions more difficult to achieve ...
>
> We join with the great majority of Canadians to demand prompt, fair settlement of the territorial and treaty claims of First Nations people, to secure their linguistic, cultural and spiritual needs in harmony with their environment.
>
> We join with the Canadian people in their support for native self government and believe that First Nations people should be actively involved in the definition and implementation of this concept. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 215)

The Canadian government failed to resolve the growing rift between Aboriginal peoples and the state. In 1991 the federal government created the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples with a mandate to find new ways of rebuilding relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. Consultation and deliberation would take four years.

Constitutional talks began again, this time with the full participation of Aboriginal people. The constitutional conferences of 1992 resulted in the *Charlottetown Accord*. The most significant

provision of this accord was the recognition of the inherent right of Aboriginal self government. It was put before the Canadian people in a national referendum on October 12, 1992 and was defeated. For Aboriginal people the most significant provision of this accord was recognition of the inherent right of Aboriginal self-government. Despite earlier polls showing wide national support for self-government, the complex contradictory provisions for greater provincial powers, and apparent undermining of women's rights led to its defeat in a nation-wide referendum. Aboriginal people would have to wait until future constitutional conferences to realize their rights.

In 1993 a Liberal government under the leadership of Jean Chretian was elected. Besides financial problems, the new government faced , there was a continuing need to address federal-provincial relationships. A Cabinet Task Force was struck under the leadership of Marcel Masse in 1994. The task force was to conduct a review of all government programs with a view to: 1) cutting government spending and reducing the deficit and 2) overhauling the bureaucracy and reducing the actual size of government. Although this Program Review differed from the Nielsen Task Force by being conducted by internal government bureaucrats, it also focused on expenditure reduction and government down-sizing with an underlying goal of reduced federal government responsibility. Likewise it did not consider Aboriginal rights, land claims, and fiduciary obligations of the federal government.

As in the Nielsen task force, Aboriginal peoples were not consulted. Documentation released by INAC made this clear,

> ... the Liberal's *Red Book* commitments regarding housing, the inherent right, post-secondary education, claims reform, and treaty process were considered not Red Book commitments but Red Book pressures in the context of Program Review, and subordinated to the overall imperative of reducing costs and the reducing federal presence. (Di Gangi & Jones, 1998, p. 176)

A second Program Review was undertaken by the same federal government in 1995-96. Once again the focus was on fiscal restraint with little or no regard for the rights of Aboriginal peoples nor consideration of federal duties and responsibilities to them. In fact federal responsibilities were reduced to meeting minimum infrastructure, social assistance and education up to grade 12 for those Indian

peoples living on reserve.

Federal provincial relations also were to suffer as a result of budget reductions. Unilateral decision-making became the mode of the day. Federal-provincial social transfer payments through the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) and the Established Programs Financing (EPF) were phased out to be replaced with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST). This change translated into a 7.4 billion dollar reduction that would be block funded, allowing provinces to set their own priorities as long as they met federal standards. The Provinces, who had become dependent on the federal government, now had to face their own deficits just as First Nations governments and communities were being forced to. (Di Gangi & Jones, 1998)

These budget cuts were also accompanied by additional off-loading of responsibilities to provincial governments including services to First Nations peoples. The Premiers responded by taking the position that "the federal government [should] accept full responsibility for all programming for Aboriginal people, both on and off reserve, with a gradual transfer to Aboriginal communities" (Di Gangi & Jones, 1998, p. 183). Neither the federal government nor the provincial/territorial governments wanted to take responsibility for Aboriginal peoples, yet each had maintained the dependency of Aboriginal peoples through the denial of Aboriginal rights, land claims and treaty rights. This federal-provincial argument is a tradition that began with the colonization of Aboriginal peoples and will continue until Aboriginal peoples are self sufficient and self-governing.

To counter the federal government's unilateral decision making, in 1996 the Premiers established the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal. This council was mandated to develop an approach to overarching social policy issues of national importance. According to Minister Day the council is "committed to finding ways to reduce overlap and duplication in social policy and program delivery. This will enhance the effectiveness or social program to the benefit of all Canadians" (http://socialunion.gc.ca/news/96nov27e.html, Feb., 21, '01). This examination of program overlap and duplication are not new. The Tory Task Force on Program Review undertaken in 1985 carried the same mandate. Likewise Aboriginal voices in the design of the initiatives were absent in 1985 and continue to be so.

In April, 1997, after consulting with some national Aboriginal organizations the Council on Social Policy Renewal released an options paper entitled, *New Approaches to Canada's* Social Union: an Options Paper, that identified five key elements of a new federal/provincial partnership:

> 1) a cooperative approach to developing and interpreting principles and standards and monitoring outcomes in key social areas;
> 2) establishing ground rules for intergovernmental cooperation;
> 3) clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each order of government;
> 4) preventing intergovernmental conflicts and developing dispute resolution mechanisms; and
> 5) developing a new approach to the use of federal spending. (Provincial/Territorial Council on/Social Policy Renewal April 29, 1997 as quoted in Di Gangi, P & Jones, R. 1998, p. 186)

The paper also outlined the roles of governments but was silent on Aboriginal issues. One of the most significant elements proposed was the care of children as a provincial responsibility. Likewise of significance was the failure to include or mention First Nations governments.

The First Ministers (minus Quebec) met again, in late 1997, to discuss national unity this time with a focus on addressing Quebec's concerns regarding confederation. In their resulting document entitled, *A Framework for Discussion on Canadian Unity*, there was no mention of Aboriginal issues. In response, the leadership of the national Aboriginal organizations tabled *A Framework for Discussion on Relationships* (November, 1997) with the First Ministers. While the Ministers committed themselves to considering the document, it did not figure into their discussions with the Prime Minister and key cabinet members in December (Di Gangi & Jones, 1998). As in the First Ministers' meetings in the 1980s, there was no recognition nor resolution of Aboriginal peoples' views and rights although Aboriginal leaders had at least been involved in the discussions.

The following year, 1998, the First Ministers directed the Council on Social Policy Renewal to develop a framework agreement on Canada's social union. This agreement was to:

> define a new partnership approach between governments in the planning and managing of Canada's social union, and focus on principles, collaborative approaches on the use of the federal spending power, ways to manage and resolve disputes, ground rules for cooperation and processes to clarify roles and responsibilities within various social policy sectors. First Ministers agreed that this framework agreement would respect constitutional jurisdictions and powers [of the federal, provincial and territorial governments but not necessarily those of Aboriginal governments.] (http://socialunion.gc.ca/news/98mar13e.html, March 13, 1998)

On February 4, 1999 *A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians An Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Governments of the Provinces and Territories* was signed. This framework will guide social policy including the *National Children's Agenda* for years to come. The *Agreement* was designed to "reflect and give expression to the fundamental values of Canadians - equality, respect for diversity, fairness, individual dignity and responsibility, and mutual aid and responsibilities for one another." (http;//social union.gc.ca/news/020499_e.html, 02/21/01) One of the fundamental principles espoused was "all Canadians are equal." As in past government policies, there is no recognition for the unique status or rights of Aboriginal peoples. There is the standard reassurance disclaimer stating, "nothing in the agreement abrogates or derogates from any Aboriginal, treaty or other rights of Aboriginal peoples including self-government." (http;//social union.gc.ca/news/020499_e.html, 02/21/01) However this does little when the essence of the agreement is built upon a notion of equality that contradicts and prohibits recognition of difference. Aboriginal peoples as in the past will have to continue the struggle for recognition of their status and rights as First Peoples of Canada.

As the forgoing review of policy initiatives reveals, Aboriginal people have been virtually left out of all decisions that affect their lives. Aboriginal peoples wage a constant struggle for recognition and rights that, despite being supported by the courts and constitution, goes unheeded by the federal government. It is within this historical and contemporary context that Aboriginal communities strive to develop their own early childhood services. If anything this history of assimilation cautions us to develop services that provide Aboriginal children with an opportunity to learn their own languages, values, and traditions. As children continue to live in a context of assimilation they fall prey to being a focal point for further assimilationist policies and institutions. The implementation of formalized early childhood services in Aboriginal communities could easily become such institutions. The greatest violation of Aboriginal children's rights would be to develop and implement early childhood programs that would serve to assimilate them into a society other than that which is their birthright. The challenge for today's Aboriginal children is to be aware of the process of assimilation so that they may preserve their own identity and not to become lost to Euro-Canadian society. This is especially important as

they live and learn in more than their own culture.

The following sections describe the development of early childhood services in Aboriginal communities.

Gaining Recognition For Aboriginal Early Childhood Services

> *... culturally appropriate child care is needed to accommodate Native family systems and practices, Native methods of learning and Native languages.*[5]

Reports and initiatives precipitating the establishment of Aboriginal child care[6] in Canada describe a great need for services. Specific initiatives for Aboriginal child care were almost non-existent in the 1960s and 1970s those that did occur were government driven activities that focused on equity with the broader Canadian society. The *Canada/Ontario Agreement Respecting Welfare Programs for Indians* (1965) made Ontario the only province with parental subsidies for child day care services accessible to on reserve First Nations parents in need. This *Agreement* gave credence to First Nations communities' expression of need for on reserve child care while at the same time acting as a model for how services could be funded like those of non-Aboriginal parents living in mainstream Canadian society.

Despite advocating a democratic ideology that belied the assimilation of Aboriginal peoples through the guise of integration and equality the *Hawthorne Report* (1967) was one of the first government inquiries to examine the needs of preschool Indian children. Although the focus of this study was on the socialization of Indian children and their preparation for integration into provincial education systems the report brought the needs of these preschool children into public view. The report pointed to the inequity of service availability and accessibility between Indians living on reserve and the rest of Canada.

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[5]Taken form the Native Council of Canada's *The Circle of Care*, 1990, p. 17.

[6]The term child care in this paper is used to signify early childhood development programs for children 0 to 6 years including preschool, day care early intervention settings etc.

Need, based on equity, continued into the 1980s. However, Aboriginal groups began to speak for themselves articulating why child care was important to them. In 1984 the Liberal government's National Task Force on Child Care gave nation-wide recognition to the need for Native[7] child care. The report of the Task Force, headed by Katie Cook, was released in 1986 not to a Liberal government but to a newly elected Tory government. This report recognized that native communities had similar needs for child care support to those of the general population:

> quality child care services would not only enable parents to pursue employment and education, but would also help preserve native language and culture (p. 87).

The link between employment, education and child care is still used as a rationale to support Aboriginal child care just as it is for non-Aboriginal Canadians. This view of Aboriginal child care, as support to parents employed or involved in education, is slowly changing as more Aboriginal scholars, leaders and groups articulate the needs of their children and families.

In 1986, the Native Women's Association of Canada made the need for Aboriginal child care public by in their presentation to the House of Commons.

> The reason why child care is so important is because of the nature of our families, of the social and economic conditions of our men and women. Our children require child day care so that we can break the cycle of poverty, we can break the cycle of alcoholism, but most important so we can pass on our culture, values and language. Without child care services designed by us for our children, in which Elders tell our children their history and assist in the teaching of our children their traditional languages and values, we will only continue to suffer racism, assimilation, and language loss. Our children will be more alienated as they grow up and the cycles of poverty, of violence and of abuse will continue. (p. 7)

This contextual view of child care is unique to Aboriginal peoples in the child care literature. As women entered the work force in greater numbers in the 1980s, literature focused on supports to working parents not on socialization of their children. Studies in the early 1990s did, however, begin to question the quality of care children were receiving which included elements of socialization.

In 1987, the Progressive Conservative government announced a *National Child Care Strategy*. The *Strategy* included three components: 1) the *Canada Child Care Act* (Bill C-144), a

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[7]The term native in this paper is used to signify Aboriginal peoples.

cost sharing agreement between the federal and provincial governments; 2) the *Child Care Initiatives Fund*; and 3) a last minute commitment to Aboriginal child care. Given the political climate of fiscal restraint, uneasy federal provincial relations and downsizing of the government it is not surprising that a national child care act was rejected. Bill C-144 died in the senate. Nothing came of the commitment to Aboriginal child care. Although there was a second commitment of 60 million dollars in 1988, it too was rescinded. The *Child Care Initiatives Fund*, was the only part of the *Strategy* to be carried forward.

The *Child Care Initiatives Fund* (CCIF) began in 1988 and continued until 1995. It was a seven year contributions program designed to encourage and evaluate child care innovations and to enhance the quality of child care in Canada. It was not intended to cover costs associated with the delivery of child care services. Demonstration, development and research projects were funded. Priority areas included: Aboriginal child care, infant/toddler care, out of school care, rural care, and special needs care. Approximately 21% of all funding went to Aboriginal groups, that is, approximately $16.6 million on 98 community based projects. The CCIF supported a variety of Aboriginal projects including: national child care inquiries, regional and community based needs assessments, development of formal training programs, program support materials, culture and language curriculum, and a wide range of service models.

> CCIF funding has enabled some (Aboriginal) communities to test and develop community and culturally appropriate standards for child day care services. Other projects have shown how language and culture are not only critical elements of Aboriginal child care programs, but also a means of reviving and retaining language and culture in communities. Most significantly, these initiatives have shown how child day care can play a role in achieving community wellness. (Government of Canada, 1994, p.1)

Despite this activity, most Aboriginal communities did not reap the benefits of the limited funding available nor was federal funding allocated for the development of Aboriginal child care services. The need for services continued on into the 1990s.

One of the most significant benefits of the *Child Care Initiatives Fund* (CCIF) was the opportunities it provided for Aboriginal peoples to identify the nature and purpose of child care services in their communities despite differing from those found in broader Canadian society. In particular, the

CCIF was successful in supporting the generation of several Aboriginal specific documents and research projects. Prior to the CCIF Aboriginal people and their child care needs had been written about. Now Aboriginal people were writing about themselves, their communities and their vision for child care.

One of the first national Aboriginal studies to be funded by CCIF was *The National Inquiry into First Nations Child Care* undertaken by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in 1989. This report stressed the importance of First Nations child care in providing children with an early sense of security, stability, motivation and pride. It also stated that child care should be regarded as a basic social service available to all parents. More importantly it regarded child care as holistic and saw its intent as not only addressing economic barriers to employment and training but also having the potential to be a vehicle for social change.

> First Nations envisage a major role for child care in undoing the damage already done . . . child care centres as foci for family healing and the nuclei for community health in the best of the word.
>
> Above all, First Nations see the child care centre as the community core. Before Indians became a colonized people, children were at the heart of the community. First Nations would restore them to that place and in so doing restore themselves. First Nations have come full circle as the creator desires. (p. 14)

In 1990, the Native Council of Canada produced *The Circle of Care*, the first national inquiry to explore the child care needs of off reserve status and non-status Aboriginal people. Like the AFN's *National Inquiry into First Nations Child Care* (1989), *The Circle of Care* (1990) viewed child day care as a potential vehicle for social change and cultural transmission. It states that,

> culturally relevant child day care is crucial for the preservation of First Nations' children's languages, traditions and identity. Child day care can be a vehicle through which cultures can be retained and transmitted from generation to generation. (p.35)

Like the stated needs of the broader Canadian population, *The Circle of Care* (1990) also found that families experienced restricted economic or educational advancement because of a lack of available, affordable child day care services. Child care services were needed to support parents in their pursuit of educational and employment goals.

These national inquiries describe a vision of Aboriginal child care that is holistic in its approach, engaged in the passing of culture and language from generation to generation and fosters the healthy growth and development of children. More importantly it illustrates some of the underlying values held by Aboriginal peoples.

> ... The values of our people have been whispered gently from generation to generation, like a thread through time, that has ensured our existence. It is the children that these values and ways of being are passed. They are our future and our survival.
>
> Children are not our possessions, they are gifts to us. This is the belief of our people. Children must be restored to their place, the heart of the community. Child care programs that reflect First Nations beliefs and values will restore our children to their rightful place and, in doing so, restore our communities to a place of power and self sufficiency.
> (Assembly of First Nations, 1989, p.6)

In 1992, the *Brighter Futures Initiative*, for First Nations children and families residing on reserve, and its counterpart, the *Community Action Plan for Children* (CAPC), for Aboriginal children and families living off reserve or outside of Inuit communities, was announced by the federal government. These five year initiatives sought to employ a community-determined approach to supporting the well-being of First Nations children and families living on and off reserve. The primary focus was on the developmental needs of children and youth between the ages of 0 and 23 years of age in the areas of: 1) community mental health, 2) childhood injury prevention programs, 3) healthy babies programs, 4) parenting skills and 5) solvent abuse. Some examples of specific activities include: the *Child Development Framework, A Handbook for First Nations and Inuit Communities* (1994) and *How About Child Development, An Introductory Source Book for First Nations and Inuit Communities* (1994). *Brighter Futures* and *CAPC* were intended to replace the promised *Child Care Strategy*, however, there was no direct provision for on or off reserve child care services. It was however, one of first programs to focus on Aboriginal children's healthy development and care. *Brighter Futures* and *CAPC* provide opportunities for communities to begin to address some of the complexities of caring for their children in a more holistic way.

One of the few Aboriginal interpretive research studies to be funded by the *Child Care Initiatives Fund* was undertaken by Judith Gilles in 1993. She studied the play of preschool children

in three First Nations communities in Ontario. The study revealed that children's play was both productive, that is, they were learning from it, and displayed appropriate developmental progression. This study stimulates many questions around cultural appropriateness, for example, assessment criteria and its appropriateness for Aboriginal children's behaviors, around purpose and utility for the community, around the concept of play and its meaning in Aboriginal cultures and so on. Despite these questions, this study is one of the first to focus on specific elements of early childhood programs in Aboriginal communities.

With the sunset of the *Child Care Initiatives Fund* (CCIF) in 1995, Human Resources Development Canada created the *Child Care Visions* as a national child care research and development program. Like the CCIF, the *Child Care Visions Program* has funded many projects in a variety of areas including: child care policy, infrastructure and capacity building, service delivery, quality, disability and inclusion, and the impact of child care on children and families. A review of 66 project synopses revealed 15 Aboriginal child care related projects. They included: a literature review of Aboriginal child care, a strategic plan for a national Aboriginal child care association, a national study on First Nations quality child care, a national study on the appropriateness of outcomes based regulation for First Nations communities with the remaining 11 projects focusing First Nations and Inuit training programs or specific components of each. These projects, like the CCIF funded ones, serve to lay a foundation for the development of Aboriginal early childhood programs.

In the summer of 2000, the *Child Care Visions Program* was directed to revisit its mandate and align it with the new government initiatives in early childhood development. This included a re-submission of the terms of reference and restructuring of the technical advisory committee to the program. This work is currently in progress.

Development of Aboriginal Early Childhood Services

Child care is a part of our dreams for self-determination and self-government. To have

productive members of our community we have to start when our children are born....[8]

As the seeds of need continued to be sewn, Aboriginal early childhood services began to appear. In 1993, the newly elected Liberal government made a commitment to create new child day care spaces in Canada. There was no mention of on reserve child day care, although a promise for an Aboriginal early intervention program was included. However, the following year, in Minister Axworthy's *Social Security Discussion Paper* (1994), a restatement of the federal government's child care commitment included First Nations and Inuit communities, that is, part of the $720 million allocated for child care would be allotted to First Nations and Inuit communities. It is out of these commitments that the *First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative* and the *Aboriginal Head Start Initiatives* were born. Through these initiatives federally supported, Aboriginal early childhood programs became a reality in Canada.

In preparation for the announcement of the *First Nations Inuit Child Care Initiative*, the Assembly of First Nations produced a document entitled, *An Overview of First Nations Child Care in Canada* (1994). This document identified critical components of Aboriginal child care services:

1. The preservation of language and culture,
2. Parental and community participation,
3. Local jurisdiction and control
4. Quality management and human resources and
5. Adequate fiscal resources (p. 20)

The document also contained a *First Nations Policy Framework for Child Care* as developed by the Rights Committee on Child, Family and Health Care (1988). This framework describes a child care system of high quality, culturally appropriate, and First Nations controlled services. *Child Care as a Cultural Issue* and *First Nations' Vision of Child Care* are two of the sections contained in the framework. Specific statements within these sections include:

> **Child Care as A Cultural Issue**
> First Nations child care must be addressed culturally and holistically. Child care must encompass First Nations values and traditions . . . child care programs (must)

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[8]Partial quote from Gilbert Parnell, Skidegate Indian Band, Participant in the First Nations Quality Child Care: A National Study, 2001.

be placed within the culture of the First Nations communities ...

First Nations' Vision of Child Care

Children are the most precious resource of the First Nations. Because child care services are required at such a crucial time in a child's development, First Nations have the right to expect that the child care system will build upon the positive identity of our children.

The care of First Nations children is first and foremost a parental responsibility.

Parents must be involved along with First Nations governments in decisions concerning the operation and delivery of child care services.

First Nations require a child care system which reflects the unique needs of First Nations society and will provide a comprehensive range of quality, accountable, community based nonprofit child care services for families requiring care.

Services that are provided in First Nations communities must be culturally sensitive, nonprofit, comprehensive, accessible, of high quality, affordable and administered by appropriate First Nations care givers whenever possible.

Quality child care to First Nations has a special meaning. Involvement of Elders with respect to Aboriginal languages and traditional values is an essential component in achieving quality care. There is a need to protect and redevelop the traditional aspect of child care particularly due to the "Mission School Syndrome".

To ensure quality, it is essential that certain standards be met by the care giver. Standards relating to child ratios, and health and safety requirements need to be met . . . Determining those standards and questions on how to monitor services should be decided by the parents using the service and the First Nations governments.

First Nations had an inherent right to develop and control their own child care systems. First Nations should develop national minimum standards for First Nations child care guidelines. Those guidelines must reflect First Nations values and traditions.

First Nations government jurisdiction, powers and responsibilities must be recognized . . .

This child care framework emphasizes high quality services that are designed and controlled by First Nations communities, that are culturally sensitive,

> comprehensive, accessible, affordable and administered by Aboriginal care givers, and that reflect the values, traditions and languages of First Nations cultures. (Assembly of First Nations, 1995, pp. 14-17)

The *First Nations Inuit Child Care Initiative* announced in 1994 had a mandate to create 6,000 new child care spaces in First Nations and Inuit communities with a fiscal commitment of 72 million dollars in the first three developmental years and 36 million ongoing thereafter. In the *First Nations/Inuit Child Care Program and Funding Framework* (1995) the Joint First Nations/Inuit/Federal Child Care Working Group identified principles similar to those described in the Assembly of First Nations' *Overview of First Nations Child Care in Canada* (1994) to guide the development of child care services in First Nations communities. These principles were also based on the teachings of the Elders and values of the nations.

> Child care services for our children must be guided by the wisdom of the generations, by the values and beliefs of our people. These programs must nurture the development of healthy children, based on their emotional, spiritual, physical and mental needs.

Mary Thomas (1995), a Shuswap Elder, teaches that,

> We cannot live in the past. History moves forward. We move but we take with us the beliefs and values of the past. These are the beliefs and values of our people, that our people lived by. Teach these things to our children. (Joint First Nations/Inuit Federal Child Care Working Group 1995, pp. 8-9)

The specific guiding principles for the initiative included the following topics:

1. First Nations and Inuit directed, controlled
2. Community based, holistic and focused on child development
3. Quality of service inclusive of:
   - child/staff ratios
   - standards, regulations and licensing
   - training
   - environments
   - administration
   - funding
   - programming- family and community involvement
4. Inclusive, comprehensive flexible
5. Accessible
6. Accountable
7. Affordable (pp. 14-15)

The following year, 1995, Health Minister Dianne Marleau announced the *Aboriginal Head*

Start Initiative. This 83.7 million dollar, four year initiative was the fulfillment of the federal government's commitment for an early intervention program that would serve Aboriginal parents and children living in urban and large northern communities. The program principles identified were similar to those of the *First Nations Inuit Child Care Initiative* (1994). However one of the significant differences between the two initiatives is the specific articulation of six program components: parental and community involvement, health promotions, social supports, education, nutrition and language and culture found in the *Head Start Initiative* but not in the *Child Care Initiative*. In the *Child Care Initiative* these components are assumed and are a part of the guiding principles. These components are mandatory and evaluation of the program at all levels is based on their implementation.

Both these initiatives strive to be holistic and incorporate the culture of the community into the program along with fundamental principles of early childhood development. At long last communities are gaining some control over the care of their children. However there is still a long way to go if jurisdiction and authority over services is the ultimate goal.

The 1996 *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* reaffirmed the need for child care services specific to Aboriginal peoples. Child care is seen as a "means of reinforcing Aboriginal identity, instilling values, attitudes and behaviours that give expression to Aboriginal cultures." (p. 449) Aboriginal people want to:

> prepare their children for stronger academic performance, but their concerns go beyond a singular focus on cognitive development. They recognize the need of families for support and respite while they struggle with personal and economic problems. They want to see early identification of children with special needs and provision of appropriate care and parent education in the community. They see high quality child care as a necessary service for parents undertaking training or gaining a foothold in the work force. (p. 449)

In 1997, a second *Aboriginal Head Start Program* was announced. This program was to support Aboriginal children and families living on reserve. The on reserve program was to be modeled after the *Urban and Northern Head Start Program* (1995). The primary goal of the on reserve Head Start program is to "demonstrate that locally controlled and designed early-intervention strategies can provide First Nations preschool children with a positive sense of themselves, a desire for learning

and opportunities to develop fully and successfully" (p. 9). Specific components for the program are the same as those of the *Urban and Northern Head Start Program* (1995).

As these new early childhood initiatives came into being First Nations communities across the country began to implement services with very little time for planning and preparation. Likewise there were few research studies or inquiries that documented First Nations community voices in defining and articulating a vision for the quality care of their children. In 1998, a national study entitled, *First Nations Quality Child Care: A National Study* was undertaken by Margo Greenwood and Perry Shawana. This is the first national study to examine and document what First Nations people mean by 'quality care' for their children. The primary goals of the study were to: examine implementation models for the development of First Nations quality child care programs and develop options for First Nations jurisdiction in child care. The study found that a First Nations quality child care program:

1. Provides safe, loving and nurturing care for children;
2. Meets the needs of the children families and communities;
3. Facilitates the passing on of the culture and language from generation to generation;
4. Provides children with opportunities to learn their culture and language so they are instilled with a sense of pride about who they are;
5. Fosters all aspects of children's growth and development and
6. Gives children opportunities to learn and develop school readiness skills. (Greenwood &Shawana, 1999, p.2)

Participants also spoke of the role of child day care in their communities. For the most part caring for children in First Nations communities in structured child care settings is foreign and new to communities. Participants in the study were concerned that child care services in centres do not reflect policies of assimilation familiar to the residential school experience. For this reason participants were clear in their desire for First Nations control over the development and delivery of child care services in their communities. (Greenwood and Shawana, 2001)

Current Early Childhood Initiatives

Children and youth are at the forefront of current Canadian social policy. Canada is in the process of establishing the *National Children's Agenda.* The *Agenda* represents a unique collaboration of federal, provincial and territorial governments' commitment to support the well-being of all Canadian children. In December 1997, the *Federal/Provincial/Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal* was charged with developing a *National Children's Agenda.* A framework developed earlier in the year identified the intents of the agenda as:

> 1. Develop long term goals and a plan for achieving positive outcomes for young Canadians;
> 2. Establish common federal/provincial/territorial priorities for action; and
> 3. Provide a basis for coordinated and integrated efforts and partnerships among many sectors which share responsibility for policies, programs and services for children and youth. (National Children's Agenda Framework Task Group Report, p. 2)

This framework made one reference to Aboriginal children.

> ***Supporting Aboriginal tradition*** - Children have a special place in Aboriginal cultures and are the hope for a strong future for Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Aboriginal children should grow up in an atmosphere that respects their unique history, recognizes their identity and values and enables them to draw on the inherent strengths of Aboriginal communities and traditions. (p. 7)

While this paragraph recognizes Aboriginal children as individuals having unique histories there is no recognition of their membership in diverse collectives that are recognized and guaranteed in the Constitution and legislation of Canada.

In preparation for engaging public opinion on the *National Children's Agenda,* the *Council on Social Policy Renewal* collaborated with the five national Aboriginal organizations: Assembly of First Nations, Metis National Council, Native Women's Association of Canada, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, in producing a booklet entitled, *A National Children's Agenda - Developing a Shared Vision* (1999). *Section IV, An Aboriginal Perspective on the National Children's Agenda* of the booklet speaks to the constitutional rights of First Nations, Metis and Inuit people and the diversity of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Likewise it speaks to the needs of Aboriginal children.

Today, Aboriginal children face far greater risk than most non-Aboriginal children since

among many things they are:

- twice as likely to be born prematurely, underweight, or die prematurely,
- three or four times more likely to suffer Sudden Infant Death Syndrome,
- 15 to 38 times more likely to suffer the effects of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome,
- six times more likely to die by injury, poisoning or violence and
- five times more likely to take their own life.

Aboriginal children are more likely to live in poverty since half of all Aboriginal families live in poverty with one in four being a single parent family often headed by a teenager. (p. 19)

People from across the country were invited to the *National Children's Agenda* focus groups to discuss common values and goals for children and to consider their vision for children in their communities. Following the consultations a public report entitled, *Public Dialogue on the National Children's Agenda Developing a Shared Vision* (1999) was produced. This document emphasized the words of Canadian citizens in two areas for Aboriginal children: first, the importance of highlighting Aboriginal children in the vision statements, and second, inclusion of values statements that recognize the value and importance of parents, Elders and extended families in the care of children as well as the unique role children play in Aboriginal communities. The following quotes, taken from the Aboriginal organizations' consultative processes, are also found in the booklet.

Inuit Tapirisat of Canada
"Children shouldn't have to leave home to receive support which is the case in the North for children who are disabled, who have to travel great distances to receive care."

Assembly of First Nations
"The scope of First Nation's child care must be broad enough to meet the diverse and changing needs of societies in transition. Child care services must be flexible to meet parent's needs for child care support while parents attend training or participate in employment through modern or traditional means. Most importantly, child care must support parents, individuals and communities in order to assist them in moving towards self-sufficiency."

Native Women's Association of Canada
"It was suggested that a component be added (to the Vision) that stipulates that children will be respected for their cultural, religious and racial backgrounds and a firm foundation will be built for children to learn respect and care for each other regardless of diversity."

Metis Council of Canada

"The Metis National Council would like to see an annual report card on the status of Metis children in the care of the state, i.e., correctional institutions, provincial family and child services, foster homes, private family care agencies, drug and alcohol rehabilitation and other social agencies."

Congress of Aboriginal Peoples

"As participants in the development of this (children's) agenda, Aboriginal people can open the eyes of all Canadians, since traditional times Aboriginal child care approaches are increasingly seen as being in harmony with emerging child development research. We believe that children represent the primary means through which our cultures can preserve traditions, heritage, and languages. In this sense our children are considered to be the hope of the future." (Public Dialogue on the National Children's Agenda - Developing a Shared Vision, 1999, p. 9)

The first initiative to take place under the umbrella of the *Agenda* was the *National Child Benefit*. The *National Child Benefit* (NCB) was implemented in July, 1998 after the First Ministers agreed,

> that the federal, provincial and territorial governments and First Nations that deliver social assistance should work together to address the issue of child poverty in Canada. This initiative provides families with supports and services, outside of social assistance, they need to provide a better life for themselves and their children. ...the National Child Benefit aims to ensure that no family has to choose between a job and benefits for their children. (p.1)

There are three primary goals to the NCB as outlined in the *First Nations National Child Benefit Progress Report* (2000): 1) to help prevent the and reduce the depth of child poverty, 2) to promote attachment to the workforce and 3) to reduce program overlap and duplication (p. 4). Funds for the program come from new federal investments in conjunction with provincial/territorial and First Nations reallocation of resources. The federal government increases its income support for low-income families through the *Canada Child Tax Benefit* and the *National Child Benefit Supplement*, ensuring that no one received less money than in previous years. First Nations and provincial/territorial governments, in turn, adjust social assistance recipients with children by an amount equal to the federal increase. These adjustments are then reinvested back into the community based programs for low income families (p.7). The programs and services to be developed can be designed and developed by the community to specifically address their diverse and unique needs. These programs and services in First Nations communities fall into five main categories:

1. Child / Day Care
2. Child Nutrition
3. Early Childhood Development
4. Employment Opportunities/Training Programs
5. Other - for example, cultural awareness, recreation activities income supplements etc.

In September, 2000, the federal government announced 2.2 billion dollars over five years for early childhood development programs in the provinces and territories. Despite the 1999 consultation report, *Public Dialogue on the National Children's Agenda Developing a Shared Vision* there was no specific mention of Aboriginal peoples nor resources for supporting their needs. The funds announced flow to the province and are administered by them. With no resolution of the old federal provincial argument over responsibility for Aboriginal peoples there is no guarantee that those funds will include provision of services for Aboriginal children.

In the Speech from the Throne in January, 2001 and there was a commitment by Government to,

> work with First Nations to improve and expand the early childhood development programs and services available in their communities. It will also expand significantly the Aboriginal Head Start program to better prepare more Aboriginal children for school and help those with special needs. (http://www.sft-ddt.gc.ca/sft-ddt/08_e.htm)

Indian Affairs is currently working on securing First Nations specific early childhood development funding. How this is being done is unknown. As of yet, there has been no announcement of an Aboriginal specific strategy within the larger *National Children's Agenda.* (Http://social-union.gc.ca/news/110900ii_e.html, 02/21/2001)

The *National Children's Agenda* offers little new funds or direction that deviate from policies of the past. However it does offer a focus on children, including Aboriginal children, that has not been there in past Canadian social policy. With this new focus comes opportunities at the community level to create social change, and to enhance the quality of life for children and families. These opportunities are always embedded in a historical and contemporary context for Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal child care services have been developed within a context of assimilation that has not changed over the decades. The struggle for independence, self sufficiency and self government continues. When

participating in the development of new programs and initiatives, it is therefore necessary for Aboriginal peoples to ask:

> do existing programs reflect assimilation policies? If so, what can be done to ensure that programs empower Aboriginal children, families and communities?

Considerations for Future Aboriginal Early Childhood Services

In Canada today, Aboriginal people are in the midst of implementing formalized child care services that are for the most part not traditional to their communities. They are on the threshold of making serious decisions for their children, for their communities and for their future as unique societies. The historical context of assimilation, use of the provincial governments by the federal government to promote its goals of assimilation, loss and ambiguity created by colonial and federal governments continue to plague Aboriginal communities and families.

The total disruption of Aboriginal families for over five generations as a result of the federal government's residential school policies negatively impacts on the enculturation of today's children into their cultures. As many Aboriginal individuals, groups and organizations have said, child care is a vehicle for the transmission of values, traditions, languages and cultures. It is more than preparing a child for school, enhancing their development or providing educational or employment support; it is about healing and survival of Nations.

It is therefore incumbent upon those involved in the development of Aboriginal early childhood services to seriously "think well" about the kinds of services that will be implemented in the heart of Aboriginal communities. Listed below are some considerations for the future development of Aboriginal early childhood services. These include:

- Development of an Aboriginal Children's Agenda be it in the community, region or nationally. We must have a say in what our children's lives will be.

- Encourage Aboriginal leadership to address the complexities of jurisdiction in all initiatives. The recognition of Aboriginal traditions is not enough, there must be recognition of the unique status and rights of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

- Ensure that Aboriginal governments are involved at the outset of any new decisions or directions with respect policy development and change.

- Ensure that children's programs reflect the culture and language of the nation, and promotes children's overall health and well being. Consideration must also be given to preparing our children for broader society through public education. These skills and knowledge must be embedded in the culture of their birth.

- We must not loose sight of the overall vision of early childhood development programs, that is to ensure the that our cultures and languages are passed from generation to generation.

- In the interim, current government policies must have the flexibility and resources for Aboriginal communities to meet the needs of their children and families.

Conclusion

The context of assimilation continues to plague Aboriginal peoples today. In the guise of equality, citizenship, integration and policy change the door has opened to allow the development of Aboriginal early childhood services in Canada. Recognition of the need for Aboriginal specific early childhood services did not become prominent until the mid 1980s. A decade later services came into being. In many cases services were developed where, in the past, there had been none. Little time was given to communities for planning and development. In many cases capacity including implementation resources was limited.

Coinciding with this development of services were government research and development initiatives designed to support the creation of service delivery models, training models, program and evaluation models and research specific studies. In the late 1980s and early 1990s a handful of national inquiries explored Aboriginal child care and components necessary to its development. These inquiries identified early childhood as: a time to pass on the teachings of one generation to another, holistic in its inclusion of the family and community and as an opportunity to enhance children's growth and development. With the introduction of the National Children's Agenda (2000) there is hope that Aboriginal children will be included in a meaningful way despite the fact that there has been no specific announcement for Aboriginal children.

There continues to be a need for further exploration of Aboriginal early childhood from both a policy and services delivery perspective. Studies that give voice to community and that document services as they are being developed may also prove to be valuable sources for future early childhood service development.

You have
noticed that everything an
Indian does is in a circle, and that is because
the Power of the World always works in circles, and
everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a
strong and happy people all our power came to us from the sacred
hoop of the nation and so long as the hoop was unbroken the people flourished.
The flowering tree was the living centre of the hoop and the circle of the four
quarters nourished it. The east gave peace and light, the south gave warmth, the
west gave rain and the north with its cold and mighty wind gave strength and
endurance. This knowledge came to us from the outerworld with our religion. Every-
thing the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The Sky is round and I have
heard that the earth is round like a ball and so are all the stars. The Wind in
its greatest power, whirls, Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same
religion as ours. The Sun come forth and goes down in a circle. The
Moon does the same and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle
in their changing and always come back again to where they were.
The life of a man is a circle, from childhood to childhood and so it is
in everything where power moves. Our tipis are round
like the nests of birds and these were always set in a circle,
the nation's hoop a nest of many nests, where the
Great Spirit meant for us to hatch
our children.

Black Elk

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